METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ORDERING GOODS, SERVICES AND CONTENT OVER AN INTERNETWORK

Abstract of the Disclosure

A billing system is provided that allows a consumer to order products from
5   computers connected to the Internet, wherein the consumer is automatically billed for
the ordered good or service by its telephone service provider. The billing system
comprises a plug-in component (52, 52'), a billing server component (62, 62'), and in
some embodiments, a merchant session gateway component (65). When a consumer
orders a product over the Internet (20), the plug-in component (52) of the consumer's
10   computer (42) establishes an Internet connection to a billing server (34) located
elsewhere on the Internet (20) to order the product. In a first embodiment, the billing
server component (62) of the billing server (34) transfers an encrypted version of the
product to the plug-in component (52). The plug-in component (52) then disconnects
from the Internet (20) and establishes a point-to-point (PPP) connection with the
15   billing server (34). During the PPP connection, the billing server component (64)
transfers an access key assigned to the order to the plug-in component (52) so that the
plug-in component (52) may decrypt the product. The consumer is charged a unit
rate or "drop-charge" for the product by the telephone service provider when the PPP
connection is established using a premium telephone number assigned and
20   administered by the telephone service provider. In a second embodiment, the
consumer is charged a per minute rate for his or her time spent accessing the product,
rather than a drop-charge. In the second embodiment, the billing server
component (62') transfers a premium telephone number associated with the ordered
product to the plug-in component (52') rather than an encrypted version of the
25   product. The plug-in component (52') then establishes a PPP connection with the
billing server (34) using the premium telephone number during which the consumer's
computer (42) downloads the ordered product from a merchant server (39) located
elsewhere in the Internet (42). The consumer is then billed for the ordered product
based on the duration of the PPP connection established using the premium telephone
30   number. Prior to downloading the ordered product, the merchant session gateway
component (65) provides the plug-in component (52') with the information necessary
for locating and accessing the ordered product.